

Chapter 22

Demetri Contreras POV:

I woke with a violent gasp, my chest heaving as if I'd been holding my breath underwater. Cold sweat slicked my back, pasting the thin shirt to my skin.

The same dream.

The searing burn of silver slicing through flesh. The terrifying emptiness as my strength was siphoned away. And what felt like the final, desperate howl of my wolf as he faded into nothing.

I panted, trying to slow the frantic hammering of my heart, only to be met with a deeper, more familiar dread. That rotten, numb sensation. It felt like it had crept another inch up my calves.

I tried to sit up, a surge of fury rising in me, but my lower body was dead weight, unresponsive lead. The rage and helplessness were twin serpents, gnawing at my soul.

A soft footstep broke the silence. It was her. Haven.

She moved to the bedside, a glass of water in her hand. Moonlight streamed through the window, outlining her slender form. "Bad dream?" Her voice was soft, husky with sleep.

I didn't answer. I just turned my head and glared at her, my eyes burning with hostility. I hated her seeing any crack in my armor, any hint of weakness.

She seemed completely unfazed by my glare, placing the water on the nightstand. "Drink some water. You have a fever. It's a normal reaction. The medicine is starting to work."

She reached out to feel my forehead. I jerked my head away, a guttural snarl rising in my throat.

"Don't touch me!" I bit out, like a wounded animal.

Her hand paused in mid-air for a fraction of a second before she withdrew it, her expression unchanged. "I need to check your condition."

Before I could refuse, she reached down and pulled back the thin blanket

covering my legs.

Every muscle in my body went rigid. My legs... my two useless, scarred limbs, were suddenly exposed in the pale moonlight.

Shame, hot and sharp as a branding iron, seared my very soul. I would rather face a thousand enemy blades than have anyone, especially her, see me like this. This broken, pathetic creature.

I expected to see disgust in her eyes, or maybe fear. But there was nothing. Her expression was the same as it had been yesterday—calm, focused, like an artisan examining a piece of work in need of repair.

She pulled on a pair of thin, strange gloves I hadn't seen before, and then her fingers rested lightly on my knee.

A tremor went through me. Not from the touch itself, but because... I felt nothing. Her fingers were there, I could see them, but my skin was just dead meat.

She pressed gently, her touch methodical as she moved down my calf, watching my face for any reaction. "Do you feel this?"

I clenched my jaw, refusing to speak.

"What about here?" Her fingers moved to my ankle, to a particularly gruesome wound where the flesh was puckered and blackish-purple.

Still, I was silent, but my breathing grew harsh and ragged.

She stopped, looking up at me. For the first time, a sliver of gravity entered her green eyes. "Demetri, tell me the truth. From where do you lose feeling?"

Her question was a scalpel, slicing through my last layer of pride. My final, most humiliating secret, laid bare so easily.

I closed my eyes, a low growl of a trapped beast escaping my throat. The words were finally torn from me, wrenched from between my teeth. "Below the knee... nothing."

I thought that would be enough that she would be satisfied with that horror. But she pressed on. "For how long?"

"Since the day I woke up." I paused, my voice laced with a despair I despised. "And... the numbness. It's been spreading."

I saw her suck in a sharp breath. It was the first time I had seen a genuinely shocked expression on her face.

She finally understood. I wasn't just dealing with wounds and poison. I

was facing total paralysis. A complete collapse of my nervous system.

I managed a cruel, broken smile. "What's wrong? Great healer. Is this part of your treatment plan, too?"

She didn't rise to the bait. She just stared down at my legs, her eyes glittering with a light I couldn't comprehend. It was a mixture of shock, a flicker of pity, and... something else. T

She looked back up at me, her voice steady and clear. "It's worse than I thought." She paused. "But also... more interesting."

Her words stunned me into silence. Interesting? She found this living hell... "interesting?"